



Fact Sheet – Nestboxes

Nestboxes and Tree Hollows

Nestboxes cannot replace the natural hollows that are, in many cases, metres long and provide optimal insulation and protection inside a thick-walled old gum tree. The only way to preserve hollows for the broad range of animals that need them for protection and breeding is to preserve old growth forests and old trees in areas where logging or clearing has taken place.

Installing nestboxes that can be monitored effectively in urban areas or parkland will benefit local wildlife, and give great pleasure to the people who watch animals use them. But, while of some use in helping threatened species at some times, nestboxes are not a realistic substitute for old trees.



Where have all the tree hollows gone?

Millions of trees and hollows have been lost in Australia since European settlement and clearing in some marginal areas continues unabated. Old trees on farms are also being lost to salinity and soil compaction or are cut up for firewood.

How are tree hollows formed?

Nesting hollows were once common in forests and woodlands. They are formed as trees grow old and fungus and/or termites eat out the dead wood in the centre of the living or dead tree. Most eucalypts do not form hollows until they are about 100 years old and, in dense forests, this can extend to 140 years. Slow-growing eucalypts such as mallee may take far longer to form hollows.



Trees planted now will not form hollows until long after the planter has died.

Forestry that harvests at 60-80 years greatly reduces the number of hollows. In cleared areas scattered trees were often left for shade but these have been gradually dying and falling, or being cut for firewood over many years. These factors have created a critical lack of tree hollows for wildlife. Lack of nesting hollows threatens Leadbeaters Possums, Turquoise Parrots, some black-cockatoos and several other species.

Competition for nesting hollows

Another important factor that has created a shortage of hollows is competition with introduced animals. Introduced honeybees colonise many hollows, and starlings, sparrows and mynahs often physically fight native birds from hollows or build their nests directly over eggs or young. This drastically reduces access to the limited number of suitable hollows still remaining.

What are the benefits of nestboxes?

Although nestboxes cannot replace the millions of tree hollows that have been lost, they can be of great benefit to wildlife in areas of human habitation, where hollows are extremely rare. Rosellas, kookaburras and other beautiful and fascinating birds can be attracted by boxes and allowed a chance to breed that they wouldn't have otherwise.

Nestboxes can be placed so that you can watch birds and mammals breed and go about their daily business, but should not be placed where vandals can see and damage them easily. Nestboxes can allow you to see animals in your area that are normally so small or secretive that you will not see them. Beautiful little Feathertail and Sugar Gliders, for example, can be seen leaving nestboxes each evening in some areas.

Nestboxes can be great fun, and we hope that you will learn from them about your local Australian wildlife.

Credit:

Grant, Jim, 1997, *The Nestbox Book*, Gould League of Victoria, Melbourne.